

Accession of Quality Officer Candidates with 202,000 Growth

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As stated by the Deputy Commandant of Manpower, "The ability to grow the Marine Corps rest squarely on the shoulders of our recruiters and Officer Selection Officers, whose job is increasingly difficult with mission growth."<sup>1</sup> Because Officer Candidate School has met the numbers, skeptics question whether quality standards have been relaxed. Despite those perceptions, the quality of individuals recruited, shipped, and screened at OCS has not decreased with the increased Marine Corps end-strength because the current generation is more highly committed to service.

### **Perceptions**

There is apprehension that MCRC will not be able to recruit the quality officer candidates, which in the past have been provided to Officer Candidate School for screening and accession. This perception comes from the life experience of the current senior leadership. The current generation of senior leaders came up in a time following the Vietnam War, when service to country was not a popular choice.

This is not the case for kids that grew up during the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> and how those events sparked

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<sup>1</sup> LtGen Ronald Coleman, Fiscal 2008 Budget: DEFENSE PERSONNEL CQ Congressional Testimony, March 28, 2007.

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national pride. "In terms of political and civic activity, Millennials appear to be more active than the previous generation (Gen X) of youth. Of special significance to the military are research findings that there may be some relationship between political activity, especially voting, and propensity to joining the military."<sup>2</sup> America's youth are key, enabling the Marine Corps to successfully meet the increased mission goals.

### **Candidate Quality**

Officer applicants know that once commissioned he/she will deploy and be involved in combat operations throughout the world. Given this knowledge of imminent danger and greater demands of the higher mission requirements, it is clear that the quality of officer candidate has not decreased because of the required growth to 202,000. With growth that will be met nearly three years ahead of expected completion, the rapid expansion has senior leaders worried that officer candidate quality will decrease in order to meet the demand for a larger officer corps.

The Marine Corps Personnel Procurement Manual states the following basic qualifiers for eligible applicants must be met:

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<sup>2</sup>Darlene E. Stafford and Henry S. Griffis, A Review of Millennial Generation Characteristics and Military Workforce Implications (Virginia: CNA, 2008), 92.

1. A full time enrolled college student or graduate with bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited school.
2. A 2.0 GPA on 4.0 scale.
3. A qualifying mental aptitude test score.
4. Physically qualified by Bureau of Medicine.
5. A first class PFT 225 or higher.
6. No moral waivers.

These basic qualifiers outline the minimum qualifying standards for officer candidates to submit an application, and once submitted, a board of officers selects the most qualified. These qualifiers have remained constant for over two decades.

The candidate quality indicators of grade point average and physical fitness test were averaged for the last four years. Since 2005, the average GPA was 3.016 and the average PFT was 256.55 points. Broken out for each of the previous four years, GPA and PFT scores for 2005 were 2.978 and 258.89. Scores in 2006 were 3.015 and 257.57. Scores in 2007 were 3.030 and 258.30. Scores in 2008 were 3.022 and 253.64. The previous year's data indicates that overall GPA has increased and that PFT scores increased until 2008, but still scores are within 4.5 points.

Despite the influence of the War on Terror and the difficulties of growing the force, quality individuals are

still seeking the challenges and opportunities that the Marine Corps offers. Those challenges that appeal to the Millennial's sense of service and willingness to solve difficult problems. Also, based on the GPA and PFT performance indicators the quality of officer applicant has not decreased.

### **Officer Recruiting**

In fact, officer selection officers are recruiting more candidates with fewer selection teams than in the previous 20 years. "During 1984, the Marine Corps had approximately 92 OSO's assigned throughout the Nation to recruit approximately the same number they recruit today with just 71 OSO's."<sup>3</sup> Today, the Marine Corps has approximately 74 officer selection officers.

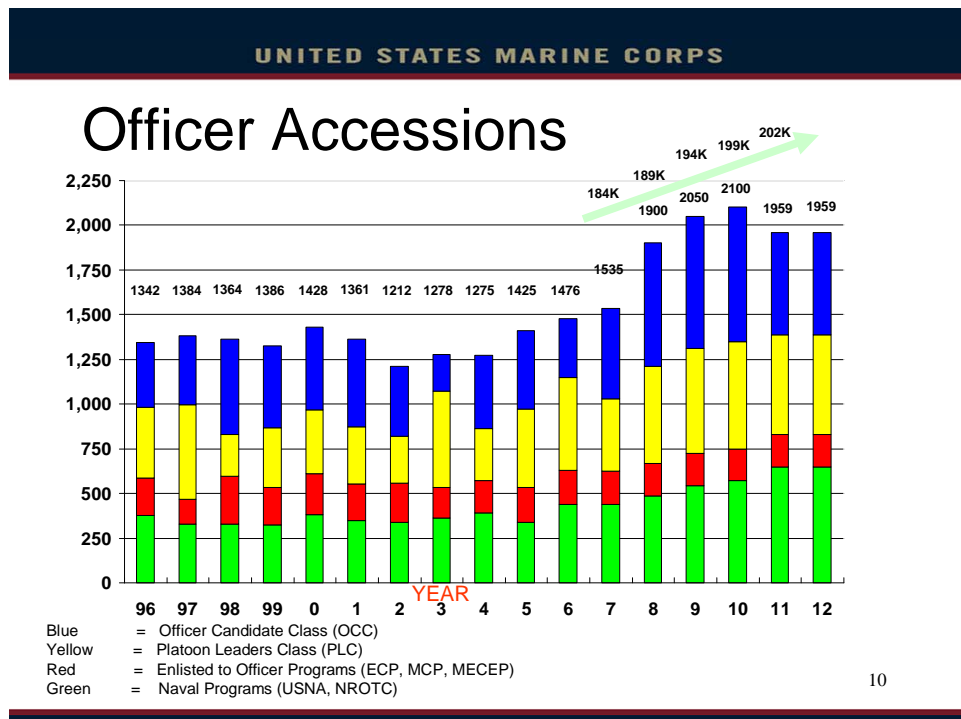
The increased growth has caused the Marine Corps to rely on the Officer Candidate Class (OCC) applicant to fill the void that the Platoon Leaders Class, ROTC, and the Naval Academy cannot assess. This greater reliance on OCC has caused a shift in the way OSO's recruit applicants, seeking fewer college students in the search for graduates. Previous years required OSO's to submit three to five OCC applicants for the three Officer Candidate Classes each

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<sup>3</sup> LtCol Sabal, Dennis and LtCol lienau, Chad. Building the Officer Corps of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Marine Corps Gazette. Nov 1997

year. Now, OSO's must submit seven to ten OCC applicants to achieve the required mission numbers.

This higher mission requires that applicants not have as much time in the OSO's candidate pool before shipping to Officer Candidate School. OSO's must identify applicants early to allow enough time to properly train candidates before shipping to OCS. Currently, OCC candidates spend an average of 87 days with the OSO before shipping to OCS. That shorter pool time can be directly linked to the lower average physical fitness test scores, which translates to increased attrition at OCS.



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LtCol Casey, Scott. Power Point, Officer Programs.

The mission increase has caused OSO's to become less selective requiring them to submit and ship most all-available qualified applicants to OCS. Being less selective requires that OCS must work in its designed purpose and screen out individuals that fail to meet the commissioning standards set forth by the Marine Corps. In no way have the OSO's lowered the standards in an effort to increase the amount of applicants shipped to Officer Candidate School, because today's pool consists of a more motivated officer candidate. These candidates want to succeed and understand the significant commitment undertaken to join the military in a time of war.

### **Officer Candidate School**

In response to the question of whether Officer Candidate School is the measure of quality for applicant's entering the Marine Corps.

...Officer Candidates School...must continue to build thinking, decisive, innovative Marines, imbued with initiative and empowered to act within the construct of commander's intent and in the face of potentially confusing, chaotic and unclear situations.<sup>4</sup>

Officer Candidate School is not and should not be the measure of quality, but it should be the litmus test to

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<sup>4</sup> *Marine Corps Vision & Strategy 2025*



ensure that high quality individuals receive a commission. It is not the OCS mission to build candidates, but rather to ensure those that graduate possess the right character traits. Still concern exists that the candidates shipped to officer candidate school are not of the same quality as in the previous years.

Last summer MCRC shipped 2,564 candidates to OCS. The four-year average is 2,148, so 2008 represents an increase of 416 from the previous years. However, an increase in the number of candidates who fail to be inducted into training has occurred. The total amount of candidates inducted into training is 2390 (93.2%) versus the four-year average 2034 (94.6%). Hence the delta is 174 candidates failed to induct. This increase can be attributed to the amount of time the candidate has spent with their OSO prior to shipping to OCS.

The shorter time spent with the candidate's OSO is evident in the 151 initial physical fitness test failures. Of those 151, 105 candidates with initial physical fitness test failures were inducted into training; 40 (38%) graduated from OCS. OCS must ensure that candidates are afforded equal opportunity for evaluation and are not sent home unnecessarily. This proves that although some candidates did not have sufficient preparation time with

the OSO, their mental and physical toughness enabled them to be successful.

The true measure of Officer Candidate School's ability to screen candidates effectively is reflected in graduation data. A total of 1,933 candidates of 2,390 (80.8%) versus four-year average of 1,705 (83.8%), shows that attrition is within 3 percent of historical average. The large increase of candidates attending OCS has not negatively affected its ability to perform the mission, nor caused OCS to deviate.

Professionalism and mentorship with positive yet challenging training atmosphere gave candidate a clearer understanding of OCS' evaluation process and responsibilities of a Marine officer.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Capt Sandstrom, Michael. Power Point Presentation: OCS FY 2008 Roll Up, with 4 yr Average. 2008



## Graduation by Program

- OCC 303 of 453 (66.8%) vs. avg 123 (73.2%)
- PLC-C 451 of 629 (71.7%) vs. avg 322 (76.7%)
- PLC-Jr 418 of 449 (93.1%) vs. avg 572 (86.9%)
- PLC-Sr 336 of 366 (91.8%) vs. avg 310 (87.5%)
- NROTC 260 of 299 (86.9%) vs. avg 226 (86.6%)
- MECEP 138 of 160 (86.2%) vs. avg 128 (87.6%)
- ECP/MCP 27 of 34 (79.4%) vs. avg 24 (88.9%)
- Total 1933 of 2390 (80.8%) vs. avg 1705 (83.8%)**

\* Eligible to commission 1191 and returned to OSO / NROTC unit to aid pool / recruiting effort  
 \* +200 more than 4 yr avg 8

Capt Sandstrom, Michael. Power Point OCS 2008

	FY04*	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08**
<b>Start Strength</b>	~1157	1499	1584	1600	600
<b>Performance Recycles</b>	23 (1.99%)	49 (3.27%)	54 (3.41%)	38 (2.38%)	21 (3.50%)
<b>Medical Recycles</b>	29 (2.51%)	52 (3.47%)	50 (3.16%)	46 (2.88%)	13 (2.17%)
<b>Misconduct Recycles</b>	3 (0.26%)	1 (0.07%)	2 (0.13%)	2 (0.13%)	0 (0%)
<b>Revocations</b>	7 (0.61%)	12 (0.80%)	8 (0.51%)	8 (0.50%)	4 (0.67%)

TBS Recycle/Revoke Rate for previous five fiscal years

The most important quality indicator is reflected in the percentage of individuals graduated from TBS. As the chart indicates, The Basic School has graduated a higher percentage of second lieutenants over the last five preceding years yet performance, misconduct, and revocations are lower or within the percentage of previous years. This could be attributed to many factors, but the most important factor is that high quality candidates were recruited, shipped, and screened through Officer Candidate School.

### **Conclusion**

Growth has occurred but quality has not suffered, nor have the standards lowered to meet the needs of a larger growing Marine Corps. Many challenges in growing the Marine Corps to 202,000 and achieving that goal three years ahead of schedule still exist, but most important, quality men and women are recruited for the Marine Corps commissioning programs and attend Officer Candidate School. As MCRC, OCS, and TBS continue to maintain or exceed the previous levels of success, the Marine Corps continues the legacy of commissioning highly qualified second lieutenants. Success, due in part to the quality of today's youth and their commitment to serve their country.

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